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EXHIBIT 13
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SB 452

I am here in opposition to SB 452. This bill is not necessary. We have no open space crisis, nor have we lost our working landscapes...most of them are tied up, hopefully not for much longer, in Judge Molloy's courtroom.

I am concerned about something. Section Four of this bill establishes a commission, that has to be paid per diem, appointed by the governor, which takes time. Seven people, but then in the list of specifications, we're looking at ten, unless one person can meet several criteria. And speaking of criterial, membership (2a) must include:

(a) the director of the department or the director's designee;

Which department might this be? If this bill is being considered so carelessly, then maybe you should think about voting to commit Montanans to a contract nobody seems to have read too closely.

Don't we already have school trust lands? And if so, shouldn't these lands be managed in such a way as to support schools? I see nothing in this bill that provides such a thing. Or is the intent here to invest in land that will not provide any significant return aside from some amorphous "conservation" benefit?

Then there is the consideration, what is the purpose of this legislation? Working forests? The fact is, land primarily valuable as forest land will stay such. Land more valuable as, gasp, homesites, well, shouldn't that go on the tax rolls? And if we buy forest land, how slicked off is it, and how long will it be before harvestable timber is on that ground. And what would the present value of that future harvest be today?

Finally, who will really benefit from this? I can see where grabbing land away from the evil developers is real popular in say, Missoula county, or Gallatin, where they passed an agricultural open space bond and had to turn right around and exempt ag producers from the taxes needed to pay for it. But there will be other counties, probably poorer and less populated, on the East Side, that will see NO benefit from this, never mind all those Montana property taxpayers who shouldn't be expected to pay to replace the property tax revenues lost from land they will never see nor visit.

I understand that land conservation, protection, or whatever, is real popular. But from an economic standpoint, from a taxation standpoint, for the state to take more land off the tax rolls makes no sense. Just because something is popular, well, that doesn't always make it right.